

Navy Reserve News Service 040/04 (July 14, 2004) – 5 Stories

Support to the Fleet . . . Ready and Fully Integrated

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Support to the Fleet . . . Ready and Fully Integrated

NRNS04004-01. Damage Control Olympics Provides Important Shipboard Training For Reservists

By Ensign Kasey S. Pipes, NR Navy Information Bureau

NAS JRB FORT WORTH, Texas—Reservists at the Naval Reserve Center Fort Worth honed their shipboard skills by participating in a Damage Control Olympics on June 12.

The DC Olympics is designed to offer Sailors the opportunity to sharpen their skills by competing against each other in various damage control events. This is the third year the Sailors at Fort Worth have taken part in this event.

“The goal of the DC Olympics is to encourage teamwork and promote seamanship for Reservists, especially those who haven't served at sea before,” said Damage Controlman Senior

Chief Michele Carter, the event organizer. "A majority of the teams who are competing are non-prior service. The DC Olympics are good for them and good for the Navy."

A record number of 11 teams competed in five different challenges including timed events to see what team could properly rig portable water pumps, dress out in complete fire fighting gear, patch ruptured pipes, move injured shipmates and rig fire fighting hoses the fastest.

Each five-member team was required to complete each of the five events. Five separate stations were set up around the base marina so teams could compete simultaneously at different events.

"Our team learned the value of working together," observed Boatswain's Mate 2nd Class James Soto of MSCO Korea 111, after his team completed the wounded shipmate relay. "Speed is very important in carrying a wounded shipmate. And the way to do it quickly is to do it together." He added, he and his teammates felt fortunate to receive this important shipboard training.

At the P-100 portable pump race, Storekeeper 3rd Class Julie Mertzig also commented on the importance of team unity.

"We're no longer individuals, we're one team," she said after completing the pump race. "That's the most important thing we learned in this. To succeed, everyone has to work as one unit and that's what we did today."

Throughout the day, cheers could be heard all across the marina as Sailors urged each other on. In the end, awards were presented.

Taylor summed up the day's events when he said, "The real winner is the U.S. Navy. After today's DC Olympics, Reservists will be better trained and better ready to fulfill their shipboard duties."

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NRNS04004-02. Hospital Corpsman Awarded Purple Heart

Navy Hospital Corpsman 3rd Class Lucas Kruse was awarded the Purple Heart on June 19th for wounds received in support of Operation Iraqi Freedom.

Kruse, a native of Minnesota, now resides in Rochester where he received the award during a Change of Command ceremony at Naval and Marine Corps Reserve Center Rochester.

Lucas makes light of the wounds which he got while clearing a house of enemy operatives while serving with the second Battalion 23rd Marines.

On the outskirts of Anasaryia, Iraq the Marine 11th Head Quarters Battalion had been ambushed and blocked off as they moved in on the city. Kruse and his unit were brought up to help clear the road. Kruse's company moved in to clear a house that had been giving fire. The Marines and Kruse moved in to suppress enemy fire and clear the dwelling of the enemy. Kruse received his wound while moving in and clearing the house.

"All of a sudden, there was a blast, the ground shook, dust everywhere, and I found myself lying on the ground with ears ringing. I felt a throbbing pain in my knee and what seemed to be bee stings in my calf, right hip, and right shoulder. With all the adrenaline, I got up and checked my guys," Kruse said. "Luckily everyone was fine. Then one of them shouted out, 'Doc you're bleeding!' I looked and found blood running out of the bottom of my pant leg. A second corpsman came over and dressed the wounds and helped me to the casualty collection point."

Kruse's wounds were not life threatening.

"It put a lot of things in perspective for me. I've always been proud of what I was a part of and will never forget the men I was with for those six months," concluded Kruse.

The United States Marine Corps does not have its own medics. The Marine medical support has always been drawn from the Navy's ranks. The United States Marine Corps is part of the Department of the Navy, and Naval and Marine Corps Rochester has sent three of its medics overseas to serve with the Marines.

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NRNS04004-03. Reserve Sailor teaches Bosnian Children

By Journalist 3rd Class Bill Steele, NAVINFO 613 Great Lakes

SARAJEVO, BOSNIA-HERZEGOVINA—Teaching English to children in Sarajevo is not what Yeoman 2nd Class Crystal Wray had in mind when she was mobilized from the Navy Reserves to active duty.

The medical assistant from Omaha, Neb., thought she would be working as an administrative assistant at Offut Air Force Base in Omaha. Upon arrival to Offut she was offered the opportunity to serve overseas in Bosnia-Herzegovina.

Drawing on experience teaching Sunday School Wray, volunteers three times a week as an English teacher at the SOS Children's Village.

The children at the orphanage took immediately to Wray's good nature and teaching ability but some of the children's first reactions to an American service member in a camouflage uniform were a bit shocking.

"When I first arrived at the orphanage a small boy ran up to me with a toy gun and yelled 'Bang,'" said Wray. "It shocked me, after all this is Sarajevo. I couldn't help but think what have I gotten myself into?"

It didn't take long, however, before Wray brushed off her shaky introduction and became hopelessly smitten with the children.

"It was love at first sight," she said. "The kids are just so sweet."

Throughout the lessons the children giggle and smile and cannot seem to get enough of their American teacher. For Wray, the feeling is mutual.

Wray works hard to hold children's attention and make learning fun by incorporating crafts and other activities into her lessons.

Holding up a piece of construction paper to her students, seated in a circle at her feet, she asks, "What color is this?"

"Orange," shouts out one of her students.

"That's right! Good!" Wray replies.

Wray is grateful for the opportunities she has been given since her arrival.

Orphanage schoolteacher, Edita Ugljesa, is equally impressed with Wray.

"I appreciate her help here so much," she said. "The children love it when she comes. I wish she could be more free from her regular work to come here more often."

When Wray left her home in January for Sarajevo, she said she didn't know what to expect. Like most Americans, she knew only of Sarajevo's notoriety—the charming and beautiful city that once hosted the 1984 Winter Olympics and the war that developed in the following years.

“It's really unfortunate,” she said. “One of the things we want to accomplish is to make the kids be happy to be from Bosnia and want to remain here. They have a beautiful country.”

The orphanage is located in a recently rebuilt area of Sarajevo, less than a mile from the so-called inter-entity border line (IEBL), the permanent dividing line that separates the two principal entities of Bosnia and Herzegovina: the Federation, peopled by Bosnian Muslims and Croats, and the Bosnian Serb Republic, also termed the Republika Srpska.

According to Ugljesa, the orphanage is built on the ruins of a bombed-out cinema, is funded largely through donations.

The neighboring village is modeled on the German-based SOS-Kinderdorf International, a humanitarian organization.

Ugljesa steadfastly avoids calling the operation an “orphanage,” feeling the term conjures up images of child abuse and harsh living conditions.

Wray is stationed nearby at Camp Butmir, a relatively small base on the outskirts of the city. Butmir is part of NATO's Stabilization Force (SFOR), the entity largely responsible for helping maintain peace in the area.

“I really wanted to experience the active duty side of the Navy,” said Wray, who has been in the Navy Reserves for several years. “The opportunities I have gotten here have been amazing.”

Wray's duties at Butmir mostly involve maintaining SFOR's personnel database, a job that requires her to keep tabs on roughly 9,000 troops from 27 different NATO nations in the Balkan region. It's a job she finds hugely challenging.

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NRNS04004-04. Reserve Sailor takes time to help MDA

By Journalist 2nd Class Auburn Hutton

POINT MUGU, Calif.—Information Systems Technician 1st Class (SW) Desmond Hall, from Naval Air Reserve Point Mugu, volunteered as a camp counselor from June 20th through 26th, 2004 at Camp Oaks, a Muscular Dystrophy Association (MDA) summer camp in Big Bear, Calif.

Hall, who attended Camp Oaks on no-cost Temporary Additional Duty orders, said his purpose in volunteering was entirely selfless.

“I was interested in helping underprivileged kids and being able to learn how they deal with everyday life. I think it's important for us to see how lucky we have it,” said Hall.

Camp Oaks was a free event for children suffering from Muscular Dystrophy (MD), a disease that affects the neuromuscular system and makes it difficult to control body movement. Around 45 kids with MD attended, all ranging from six to 18 years of age. Since there were 48 military and non-military volunteers at the camp, there were enough to give each child plenty of one-on-one interaction.

According to Hall, Camp Oak consisted of different activities each day.

“We did things like swimming, arts and crafts, horseback riding and studying the solar system. Each day had it’s own special theme to follow: Las Vegas Night, Hawaiian Day, New Orleans, Texas, and Red, White and Blue. There was also a talent show and a formal dance at the end of the week,” said Hall.

Although the week provided plenty of opportunities for both the counselors and children to relax and enjoy themselves, Camp Oak provided challenges as well.

“I think many of the volunteers expected the experience to be a cake walk. You hear ‘summer camp’ and you get a vision of an easy, fun-filled week. It was fun, but it was also a lot of hard work. During sleeping hours, we had to turn the kids over 4 or 5 times a night so they could get in a comfortable position for sleeping. Each morning, we spent a lot of time getting the kids dressed, showered and ready for the day. It was challenging,” said Hall.

During his stay at Camp Oak, Hall was assigned to one particular child, fourteen-year-old Nathan Boyle, an MD patient permanently confined to a wheelchair. Hall and Boyle spent nearly all their time together during the weeklong camp, and were able to build a long-lasting relationship.

“After three or four days of camp, you really get personal with the kids. By the end, you’ve established a relationship with them,” said Hall.

Along with all the outdoor activities Hall and Boyle did during the week, they had time to sit and talk to one another too. Hall said he remembered one time during the week where he truly felt like a mentor to Boyle and was able to reach him on a more personal level.

“At the end of the week, there’s a formal dance for all the kids to attend and Nathan didn’t have a date yet. I told him to go ask another girl that had already turned down three guys. So after he went and asked her, he came back with a sad look on his face and said, ‘She turned me down too. I guess I’m number four.’ Well in the end, he ended up going to the dance anyway and met another girl there that he hit it off with. The situation made me realize that these kids may have MD, but they’re also very normal,” said Hall.

Hall’s favorite memory from Camp Oak was the talent and fashion show put on by the children at the end of the week.

“They were out there singing their favorite songs and modeling different clothing for us. They even read their own poems and sang the national anthem. It was really touching. These kids truly brightened our days,” he said.

When the week came to a close, Hall said he was sad to see Boyle go. The two exchanged phone numbers and email addresses, in hopes to stay in touch with one another. Even though Camp Oak was over, Hall still had plenty of memories to hold onto.

“I feel I made a difference in at least one kid’s life. I helped Nathan fulfill his dreams, as well as give him encouragement and motivation,” said Hall.

Hall said he looks forward to the next opportunity in life where he is able to volunteer toward an effort like Camp Oak again. He recommends other Sailors volunteer their time as well.

“It just feels good to give kids a chance to do things they don’t do in their everyday lives. It let them be normal for a change and certainly gave them a week they can remember.”

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NRNS04004-05. From Sailor to Citizen

By JO2 Auburn Hutton

MANTA, Ecuador—For most Sailors, an ongoing professional concern is when they'll promote to the next rank or where their next duty station will be. One Sailor from Patrol Squadron (VP) 65 has a much bigger concern on her mind, something life changing.

Storekeeper 3rd Class Fides May Gacad is preparing to become a U.S. citizen.

"The command is helping me to expedite my citizenship. A law came out a few years ago that speeds it up if you're in the military," said Gacad.

Gacad, a Selected Reservist who enlisted in the Navy for two years, said the military has been very helpful in making the citizenship process not only shorter, but also much easier. "All I do is fill out a form and the command takes care of the rest. It's much better than the normal process where I have to go to Los Angeles, line up and wait my turn."

Gacad was born in Baguio, Philippines, moved to the United States in December 2000. According to Gacad, she has wanted to apply for citizenship since the day she arrived. Both Gacad's father and brother became U.S. citizens, which helped inspire her to make the decision.

"It will give me more opportunities," said Gacad. "When I am a citizen, I'll be equal to all Americans. Doors will open for me both in government and civilian employment. Some jobs I already qualify for I can't get because I'm not a citizen. It really holds me back."

Another reason Gacad is anxious to become a citizen is because of the opportunities it will give her five-year-old son, Jayson.

"If I become a citizen, my son is automatically made one too," she said. "I'm excited for him. He'll blend in with the crowd and be treated the same instead of as a minority."

Gacad plans to fill out the paperwork for U.S. citizenship during the upcoming months. For now, she's busy with her family obligations as well as her civilian job as a supervisor at the Naval Exchange on Naval Air Station Point Mugu, California.

"My plan for the future is to gain seniority in both my military and civilian jobs, but my priority is to give my son a good education," said Gacad.

Gacad performed two weeks of annual training while detached to Manta, Ecuador, in June 2004.

Ecuador is the first foreign country she's ever visited. Gacad says she's thoroughly enjoyed the experience and has learned a lot about herself and her peers.

"The Navy has made me realize that being part of a group is important. I've gained many more friendships and become more open to people from different backgrounds and walks of life. It's also given me more confidence and helped build my self esteem," she said.

With the experience Gacad has gained in the Navy, and her continued drive for success, she is ready for the rights, privileges and obligations of U.S. citizenship.

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